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ABSTRACT

In 1981, the Pittsburgh (Pennsylvania) Board of Education contracted with an External Review Team composed of educators of national stature representing diverse perspectives and experiences to realize a portion of its mission statement, "To provide the board of education, the superintendent of schools, and the general public of Pittsburgh with an objective assessment of: (1) the priorities set by the board of education since 1980; (2) the programmatic responses of the superintendent and administration to those priorities; (3) the implementation and evolution of these programmatic responses and their integration into the educational program by school district staff; and (4) the status of the overall educational program compared to other public school districts." The educational program audit examines a large number of individual program-focused activities. As an evaluation tool of educational programs, it reviews common themes, outcomes, and problems. This report describes the motivation behind the Pittsburgh School District's educational program audit, the manner in which it was designed and conducted, and the benefits realized from the effort. In addition, the External Review Team members share their perceptions of the audit, analyze its pitfalls, state how to avoid pitfalls, and recommend how to realize audit objectives. The review team found that: (1) Pittsburgh's children are well served by their public schools; (2) outstanding professionals staff the city's schools; and (3) school programs are relevant because of systematic and coordinated planning. Student achievement score gains reflect the successes of educational programs in the Pittsburgh school district. (JAM)

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Seeing the Whole Picture: The Educational Program Audit

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Seeing the Whole Picture: The Educational Program Audit

Introduction

In spring 1988, the Pittsburgn Board of Public Education commissioned what it called an "educational program audit." This audit was conceived as a unique form of evaluation, one that would permit a wide-ranging review of all of the district's efforts pertaining to educational programming. The scope of the effort included curriculum, instruction, discipline, student assessment, educational leadership, and professionalism. What emerged was a type of evaluation that offered opportunities unlike any other. It permitted the synthesis of knowledge gained across a wide variety of program areas. It allowed observations about how best to coordinate such varied programs into a coherent whole.

To generalize, the educational program audit examines a large number of individual program-focused activities. It notes common outcomes, themes, and problems that might suggest issues that are more structural than those that would be realized in more typical forms of evaluation. The educational program audit also provides commentary on how well or poorly various district efforts are interacting with each other to form a complete educational program. These evaluation outcomes represent achievements well beyond what is possible through the analysis of monitoring data or the program-focused evaluation that defines the typical work scope of departments of research and evaluation within school districts. For this reason, the educational program audit represents a unique and useful evaluation tool. To be most effective, the audit must be broadly focussed and must encourage and respect the professional judgment of the review team members as they explore issues that they determine to be important and offer advice to the district.

This paper examines one such effort, describing the motivation behind it, the manner in which it was designed and conducted, and the benefits that were realized from the effort. Perhaps most valuable of all, individuals who were most closely involved in the exercise will share their perceptions of the educational program audit: its pitfalls and how they might be avoided; its promises and how they might be realized.

Setting

In 1981, the Pittsburgh Board of Education established ten priorities for the district. They were organized under two broad headings: School Improvement and Cost Effective Management. In 1986, the board reviewed and revised its priorities, setting them in four major areas: Achievement, Fiscal Responsibility, Student Discipline, and Sustaining and Improving [Various] District Initiatives.

In March, 1988, to get an independent perspective on the district's programs, the Pittsburgh Board and its superintendent contracted with an External Review Team to accomplish the following mission:

> **Mission Statement:** To provide the board of education, the superintendent of schools, and the general public of Pittsburgh with

an objective assessment of: 1) the priorities set by the board of education since 1980, 2) the programmatic responses of the superintendent and administration to those priorities, 3) the implementation and evolution of these programmatic responses and their integration into the educational program of the Pittsburgh Public Schools by district staff, and 4) the status of the overall educational program compared to other public school districts.

The mission of the External Review Team defined a special type of evaluation, the educational program audit. An audit occurs to verify claims made by a practitioner. In this case, the audit focused on the educational program that had been developed by the superintendent and administration of the Pittsburgh Public Schools since 1980 in response to board priorities. The work of the review team was not, however, limited to simple review of district practice in an attempt to establish a correspondence between priorities, plans, and activities. Instead, a strong element of judgment was required, beginning with the selection of the review team members.

Those selected to serve on the External Review Team were educators with national stature, representing diverse perspectives and experiences. Their charge was not the review of a single project or collection of projects or of a single report or series of reports. Rather, it called for a critical inspection of the district's entire educational program, particularly as it related to the board's priorities. This meant that the review team was invited to comment on the spirit of the board priorities as well as their literal content. The element of judgment was valued and "texture" or "feel" was a legitimate focus, just as data and written reports were. In short, this audit was district-initiated, comprehensive, and focused on the relatively long-term development of an educational program.

Assembling the External Review Team

The External Review Team was selected in two stages. First, the superintendent and the district's Director of Research, Evaluation, and Test Development (who served as the district's liaison to the review team) chose the chair of the review team, Peirce Hammond, Deputy Executive Director of the Southeastern Educational Improvement Laboratory. Hammond, an educator known to both of them, had urban education experience in two large districts, including service as the head of the research and evaluation unit in Cleveland. Next, those three, in consultation with the President of the Pittsburgh Board of Education selected the balance of the team.

The review team was constituted to represent major constituent groups. It included teacher, superintendent, board member, administrator, and researcher representation, and was also representative by race and gender. The teaching representative was nominated by the district liaison. He was Miles Myers, President of the California Federation of Teachers (and Administrative Director of the Bay Area, California, and National Writing Projects. The superintendent representative was Floretta Dukes McKenzie who retired as superintendent of the Washington, DC, Public Schools shortly before the audit was begun. McKenzie was known to the Pittsburgh superintendent, the board president, the review team chair and the district liaison. The board representative was Rita

Walters, President of the Los Angeles Unified Board of Education. She was known to the board president and to the superintendent. To complete the review team, a researcher with national stature was sought. Beatrice Ward, previously Deputy Director of the Far West Laboratory for Educational Research and Development, working as an independent consultant and well known for her work in the area of research on teaching, was selected. She was known to the superintendent, the district liaison, and the review team chair.

While the review team was selected to provide substantive balance and varied perspectives, the quality of its membership was such that the whole was greater than the sum of its parts. First, each person represented far more than the narrow interests of her/his group. Second, each was experienced and understood the need and value of diverse viewpoints in this process. Third, each knew a considerable amount about educational practice in other districts to contribute ideas about alternative approaches and about the pitfalls and promise of the strategies being employed or considered in Pittsburgh.

The Review Process

The educational program audit mirrored the program planning and development cycle of the Pittsburgh Public Schools (Wallace, 1986; LeMahieu, 1984). That cycle begins with a far reaching assessment of needs. This includes a comprehensive review and analysis of existing data as well as the assessment of the perceptions of all major constituents regarding the conditions in the district most in need of attention or improvement. The results of the needs assessment are presented for review by the school board, typically at a retreat convened especially for that purpose. The board considers all relevant data and then establishes a set of priorities that serve as the guiding focus of the district's efforts for the ensuing years. Subsequently, the superintendent convenes committees to prepare plans to address the board's priorities, and program design is begun. From that point forward, all of the district's programming efforts and all actions submitted to the board for approval must be justified in terms of the board's priorities. Historically, the cycle lasts approximately six or seven years, before beginning anew.

The Educational Program Audit began with an analytic review of the comprehensive plans developed by the administration in response to board priorities of 1981 and 1986 (Hammond, 1988a and 1988b). The review team agreed with the board and superintendent to focus on four areas: Achievement, Discipline, Staff Evaluation, and Attracting and Holding Students. The basic questions to be addressed included whether the desired programs were being implemented in a way that was consistent with the board's priorities; whether they were likely to achieve the mandates established by the board's priorities; and whether they represented "state-of-the-art" practice. The next activity, undertaken in Spring 1988, saw the review team interview over 30 key staff members involved in the planning and implementation of programs designed to fulfill the board's priorities (Hammond, McKenzie, Myers, Walters, and Ward, 1988). Finally, in Fall 1988, the review team observed these programs in 10 schools (out of 72) and discussed them with over 100 district employees charged with their implementation (Hammond, McKenzie, Myers, Walters, and Ward, 1989).

Important Characteristics of the Educational Program Audit

There were several characteristics that made this Educational Program Audit unique with respect to the evaluation activities typically pursued in school districts. These characteristics contributed to the success of this undertaking, and make it worth considering by others. As noted above, the characteristics of the audit were the fact that it was district-initiated, it was comprehensive in nature, and it was designed to permit a longitudinal view. The implication of each of these characteristics is discussed briefly below.

District Initiated - While school districts commonly undertake evaluations of individual projects often this is still in response to mandates from project funders such as the Federal Government (e.g., Chapter 1). These evaluations are what King and Pechman (1984) call "signalling....The use of evaluation information as signals from the local school district to funding and legislative support agencies that all is well." In the twenty-four years since the passage of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, there has been increasing understanding of the substantive and political value of evaluation. Modern superintendents make use of evaluation as a fact of life and a potential asset. When they do, the evaluation is "charged....[that is,] actively used by local managers...." (King and Pechman, 1984). While not all superintendents are sophisticated in their understanding of evaluation, there are some who are quite knowledgeable. Pittsburgh Superintendent Richard Wallace has worked hard to establish a climate that respects the use of evaluation and its results in program planning and implementation.

Others (e.g., Cooley and Bickel, 1986; Alkin, 19??; and Cronbach, 1982) have observed the power of a sincere interest in the client's needs and perspectives in promoting the usefulness and use of evaluation. This so-called "client orientation" is essential not only to ensure the client's cooperation in and commitment to the work, but even more to assure that the evaluation appropriately matches district needs and is highly likely to have an effect on district educational practice.

When Wallace found that a simplistic use of statistics misrepresented the progress he believed the district to have made between 1980 and 1988, he determined to ask an independent review team to review the district's efforts during that period. While Wallace's agenda for the audit was, consequently, partially defensive, [partially in response to this situation,] he was careful to ask the review team to be broad-ranging. He charged it to determine the extent to which the Pittsburgh school district's reputation for innovation and progress was warranted. Further, he ensured the ownership of the study by his school board by having members of the review team meet with the board to discuss plans and amend the proposed activities based on that discussion. In particular, the board president was included in a variety of ways that shaped the audit agenda: he helped select the review team; he, too, asked the team to shed light on the district's newly won reputation; and he raised issues and suggested areas of inquiry for the consideration of the review team (e.g., that the district's possible overemphasis of the cognitive aspects of education and consequent underemphasis of the social, cultural, and emotional components of learning).

Comprehensive - The comprehensiveness of this educational program audit distinguishes it from most program-specific evaluations in that the review team set out to determine the consistency of outcomes across programmatic efforts with common goals, discover fundamental themes across projects, and analyze recurrent problems in implementation. In this audit, the review team found that the district had, indeed, established a successful basic skills program that had raised student achievement and brought the district together psychologically. What the district faced, however, were the limitations of its basic skills program and the need to integrate higher cognition as well as social, cultural, and emotional components into its educational program. Furthermore, this need existed not simply to continue achievement gains, but to realize other highly held goals, namely, placing greater emphasis on eliminating the racial achievement gap confronting the district and building the discipline program that had been neglected while the basic skills emphasis dominated.

A different, though no less pervasive, theme emerged as the review team examined the district's staff evaluation program. The district's Pittsburgh Research-based Instructional Supervisory Model (PRISM) program, includes the well-known Schenley High School Teacher Center. The development of this center occurred largely because of the mutual respect and cooperation that developed among the board of education, the superintendent, and the head of the Pittsburgh Federation of Teachers. The PRISM program was developed because the superintendent argued that the board's desire to rid the district of inadequate teachers and administrators could only be carried out once it was established that: (1) each teacher and administrator had been informed as to the district's definition of effective instruction and effective instructional leadership; (2) each teacher and principal had been provided adequate instruction about how to be effective within the terms of that definition; and (3) each had been given a fresh opportunity to teach or lead effectively.

This argument led to the establishment of a wide range of staff development programs (Wallace, LeMahieu, and Bickel, in press). The programs developed for and with teachers have been highly acclaimed and successful in the view of the review team as well as those of other external evaluators. Those for and with principals have not enjoyed similar success. Indeed, the review team found a need for a support system for principals, especially newly-appointed ones. Unfortunately, the review team found that a negative tone characterized the board's relationship with the district's administrators, an air of mistrust and uncertainty that is inconsistent with the constructive programs and support that have been the foundation of the district's accomplishments.

While there is an opportunity, in a comprehensive study, to identify broad themes and insights that cut deeper than is possible through traditional project evaluations, there is still a risk that what is observed is not really "there." The risk derives from several factors: First, there is an ever present danger for all evaluators. Co-optation--being unduly influenced by personality or circumstance is a risk with this form of evaluation. The magnitude of the task taken on by those responsible for education in any major school district is such that sympathy comes easily. As Cooley and Bickel (1986) note, this kind of research, being what they call decision-oriented educational research, has "...the deliberate objective of generating

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information that is of immediate use in some policy or decision context. [p. 35]." Such research must walk the line between what decision makers want to hear and what they need to hear even more carefully than other kinds. Second, the review team will have some biases built in by virtue of its composition. Some will occur because human beings all have biases. Some because a representative model of some kind will almost surely be used to decide the categories of people to be included on the review team and people's experiences tend to influence their perceptions (a strength as well as a weakness). Third, it is easy to wish to be associated with success and as easy to wish to be known as an advocate for good causes (e.g., educational equity). This can lead to "band-wagon" support or to hyper-critical reporting.

Fourth, the review team was dependent on personal reports to provide the evidentiary material for its deliberations. For although written evidence and field observations were also employed, they were not designed for the audit itself (as the interviews were) and, while indispensible, provided an incomplete sense of the district's educational program. As a consequence of this dependency, one of the problems confronting the review team was establishing the validity of the perspectives offered by those being interviewed. For example, district employees, when confronted by an outsider, often tend to "circle the wagons," responding in ways that protect the district, and even to react defensively rather than openly. Others may view the audit as an opportunity to serve a personal agenda through selective "testimony." The review team handled this problem by attempting to "triangulate" by probing a variety of sources about each concern. In addition, some people were interviewed more than once, to explore new issues or to revisit those about which the review team had new evidence or further questions. Finally, a wide variety of types of evidence (e.g., statistical analyses, research and evaluations, in addition to the self-report information) were obtained and examined. Limitations on the review team's ability to use these measures included the amount of time available on site and the fact that knowledge of the particular details about any district program accumulates with experience in the district, which uses that time.

Finally, it is easy to try to outguess the media or others who it is believed will "use" the report in some fashion. While it is not certain that this review team avoided all these problems, the members of the review team were well aware of them and steps were taken to address them. The superintendent also set a tone of intellectual honesty that permitted genuine and warranted criticism to be expressed. In addition, each person on the review team realized that mere expressions of admiration were not, in fact, useful to the district. Each also felt a strong obligation to represent the needs of students and to accept the superintendent and board presidents' charges to provide an objective appraisal of the program. Finally, members of the team tended to check and balance each other: those who might tend to be overly laudatory of an activity were often balanced by someone critical of it and vice-versa.

In the case of the final report of the review team (Hammond, McKenzie, Myers, Walters, and Ward, 1989), the concern about what the media (and others) led not to the potential self-entrapment of second-guessing, but to the inclusion of the following statement:

In what follows, there will be some questions raised, some criticism offered, and some doubts expressed. It should be explicitly understood by the readers of this document that all of these not withstanding, the Pittsburgh Public School District is, without question, one of the finest urban districts in the country. We do not know of any other that has done so much in the past eight years. The accomplishments of the district are many and are remarkable. The people of the city of Pittsburgh are receiving excellent service from their schools and those who lead them. They are fortunate, not simply because these educators and board members are doing a superior job, but because they continually seek to do their job even better.

Anyone reading this report who does not include the sentiments expressed in the preceding paragraphs will have misinterpreted this report and the views of the External Review Team (Hammond, et al, 1989, p. i.).

Examined long-term change efforts - The third characteristic of this educational program audit was that it attempted to review activities that developed and evolved over an eight-year period (from the beginning of the Wallace superintendency to date). This suited the comprehensive nature of the audit, and gave a depth to the study that was desirable. The combination of comprehensiveness and longitudinal perspective meant that the team reviewed the collection of programs that had accumulated in the district with a particular concern for connections and contradictions between and among them. The team members realized that programs evolve in response to outside pressures and trends. Once in place, programs may then continue on their own despite changing needs in the district and its community. The educational program audit brings a fresh perspective with its review and allows questions about the continued relevance of programs to be raised. Finally, the longitudinal nature of the audit means that trends may be observed and anticipated. In this case, the review team brought to the district's attention the fact that an announced priority, discipline, was not being treated as a priority. Further, the team pointed to the problematic interaction between the neglect of this area and the next steps that were called for as the district continued to address the priority of student achievement which had been its prime focus.

The longitudinal nature of the audit also added to the problems of perspective and veracity, because some actions were not recent, and because some of the actors (only a few, thankfully) who had played major roles were no longer with the district at the time of the study.

The longitudinal emphasis adds a helpful perspective to the study, but for a variety of reasons (e.g., the decision-oriented nature of the audit) there is a tendency to focus on the present. This is beneficial to the extent that it forces attention on constructive action, but it may cause or exacerbate a tendency to dwell on problems and to overlook accomplishments. In this audit, for example, the accomplishments of the basic skills program could have been overlooked. The questions about higher cognition, and about social, cultural, and emotional factors are second-generation questions. That is, while they are real and immediate issues for Pittsburgh, they derive from the base already

established and ask, in effect, how will the Pittsburgh schools move on from here? This perspective is more readily achieved in a longitudinal and synthetic view.

Thoughts About Conducting an Educational Program Audit

Appropriate Questions - As was noted earlier, an educational program audit, using the most basic definition, occurs to verify claims made by a practitioner. The appropriate questions for such an audit have to do with the accuracy of the claims in a literal sense--do the claims make sense; does a sampling of relevant evidence support them; were the procedures used to develop the claims "state-of-the-art;" is this district, in short, making a proper accounting to the public? Questions that elicit evidence evaluating such claims are clearly within the purview of a program audit. The nature of this audit took the review team far beyond such narrow questions. Indeed it is highly unlikely that the people who carried out the audit would have considered doing so had they not felt free to explore beyond narrow questions in the interest of the broader good of educational improvement for Pittsburgh. The members of the review team were aware that they were selected for their personal expertise. This not only allowed professional judgment to be applied, but expected, encouraged, and valued it.

Under these circumstances, review team members explored topics with district staff members in a give-and-take fashion. Questions about the place of child development in the district's program, effective discipline programs, parent involvement, and ways to encourage students to go on to college were examples of those investigated within the general framework or mission of the audit. Thus, the educational program audit also undertook to explore issues of critical importance to the district in its pursuit of an effective definition and delivery of its educational programs.

Use of the Results - As of this writing, it is not possible to document all of the ways in which the results of the educational program audit have been or will be used. Two things, however, seem clear. First, the audit succeeded in its essential mission to investigate the credibility of the claims of accomplishment by the district. Second, there are many more uses beyond that relatively narrow one for which it will eventually prove beneficial.

As described earlier, this educational program audit had as its primary goal the investigation of whether the apparent successes of the school district could be validated rationally and in the judgment of an external review team of respected professionals. The district routinely investigated student achievement and had for several years reported gratifying increases in test scores. Moreover, many of the district's programs were often cited as exemplary and of national stature. Further, the system had taken care to audit the quality of its test results, repeatedly finding them to be a veritical reflection of student achievement throughout the district. In addition to all this, however, a final, and in some ways more convincing, element of its public accounting required an investigation of the quality of its programs. This would reassure the school board and the public that beyond the numbers in the reports of test scores, there was both a vision of educational reform and programming of sufficient quality to make those numbers plausible.

The educational program audit succeeded in this regard. The school board has taken to heart the findings of the audit. A news release has been made, summarizing the results of the audit. Articles have been published in the local newspapers and major television and radio stations have carried the story, even interviewing review team members on the air. The board and the administration have made references to it whenever questions of programming quality have come up.

Beyond this rather narrow accountability function, however, lies a more profound use of the audit results, namely its instrumental use as a motivator for change and continued reform within the district. Pittsburgh, like many other districts throughout the country, has been active in its pursuit of educational reform over the past decade. In a number of areas, it has realized significant successes. However, it is possible, even likely, that after a certain period of attending to this consuming work the energies that fuel the reform movement might begin to wane (a point made in the final report itself).

Flagging energies do not diminish the challenge. Urban education, even after a considerable measure of success, remains fraught with problems that require a re-energizing of those whose responsibility it is. While no conclusive observations may be offered at this time, there are signs that the educational program audit may assist here.

The school board has analyzed issues using the terms and perspectives of the audit. For example, through the audit, the board realized that it had neglected the priority it had set for improving student discipline. By the time the audit was concluded, and as a result of it, the district was already taking steps to reorganize and stabilize the administrative unit responsible for student discipline.

Of even greater instrumental impact is the role the audit is playing within the administration's own discussions about policy and programs. Each of the several administrative divisions whose work was reviewed in the audit received copies of the report. Division personnel then devoted time to its review and discussion. They are now engaged in identifying those ways in which their own efforts can be made to respond to the constructive criticisms and rich suggestions of the report.

General Promises and Pitfalls - One key to the success, or at least the harmony, of this educational program audit was that the review team consisted of individuals who got along well with each other. This was a blessing for which complete responsibility cannot be claimed or assigned. While selection of the actual review team members is at least partly controllable (there is a political element in both the categories of persons and the actual individuals chosen), team "chemistry," is much less so--indeed it is hardly predictable at all.

The district brought in outside experts and let them go where they wished, see what they wanted to and write what they would, all with a minimum of influence exercised. Draft reports were reviewed by district staff members. Three sorts of comments were offered: (1) facts that were in error were pointed out and

corrections offered. (2) occasional wording that was problematic because of district history was pointed out along with a request for a change, and (3) questions regarding the intent were explored. In each case, care was take to respect the intentions of the review team.

The result was that the district received a validation of its overall program. Further, many of the specific details were also validated, although some others were called into question. As important, some of the problems that were sensed by the superintendent, such as a concern about overburdening staff, were examined in a way that neither district staff nor any single evaluation could have. The audit pointed out additional resources that the district might call upon. These included (1) suggestions about making use of the expertise of particular principals who were heading schools in which black students achieved to assist the leadership of schools with large racial achievement gaps, (2) alerting the superintendent to a person to fill a significant vacancy on the district staff, and (3) pointing out a major report that had been provided to the district, but had not been fully used, as a resource critical to the next steps the district needed to take.

Another virtue of the audit was that the review team members enlarged the focus of the conversations going on within the district. They did this partly because no member felt restricted to her/his particular area of recognized expertise. In addition, each listened to the questions that the others asked and incorporated their concerns and insights within his/her own and deepened them. The review team presented the opportunity for a thoughtful exchange.

Finally, each review team member felt an obligation to make a contribution to those who were taking the time to work with them. An example of this occurred at one high school. The school had a new principal. When the review team members began to talk with a group of students who had been gathered in the principal's office, she asked if it would be appropriate to stay. The review team was pleased to have her stay. It was obvious that she was most impressed by the presence of former Washington, DC Superintendent Floretta Dukes McKenzie. During the course of the discussion, McKenzie provided the sort of modeling that all were seeking. One of the students was a young lady with obvious ability. She was, however, shy and very nervous as she contemplated her future. No one in her family had ever gone to college, but clearly she could and should go. With no one to show her the way and a family with no extra money for the expense of college applications, she was lonely and uncertain. Finally, McKenzie took out her checkbook and wrote out a check for the first application fee and gave it to the principal, in trust, for the young lady. That is the best an audit can be. By itself, it does not justify the expense and arrangements needed, but it represents the heights that can be reached.

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Appendix

Findings

The basic finding of the review team was that the people of Pittsburgh and, more importantly, their children are well served by their public schools. The district's leadership is strong and caring. Its priorities and programs are good ones. The teachers, principals, and other staff members we met are outstanding professionals. The district is headed in the right direction, using systematically developed plans that assure that students will be increasingly well served in the days and years to come. The Team reached general conclusions in each of the four areas identified in the Mission Statement and more specific "findings and recommendations" in the four areas of focus negotiated with the board and superintendent.

I. The Priorities: The External Review Team believes that the board's priorities are appropriate and well-conceived. In 1986, the board wisely reviewed and revised its 1981 priorities to reflect changing times, emerging needs, and progress made by the schools. These modifications did not signal a major change in direction, but instead, refocused the district's resources within previously established priorities such as Achievement and Student Discipline.

II. The Programmatic Responses of the Administration: In response to the board's priorities, in both 1981 and 1986, the administration engaged district personnel and some community representatives in a systematic planning process. Representative committees carefully studied the major components of each priority area and prepared comprehensive, research-based plans for implementation of programs to carry out the priorities.

III. The Implementation and Evolution of Programs: Program plans have been implemented systematically and in a manner consistent with the board's priorities. Allowance was made for review, revision, and adaptation to individual circumstances that arose in varying contexts.

IV. The Status of the Overall Educational Program Compared to Other Public School Districts: The Pittsburgh Public School District has, without question, established itself as one of the outstanding urban districts in the country. We do not know of any other district that has accomplished so much in the past eight years. The district has avoided the temptation of the "quick fix" and has resisted finger pointing. It has unified its leadership and its staff and become fully engaged in meeting its educational responsibilities. The people of the city of Pittsburgh are receiving excellent service from their schools and those who lead them. They are fortunate, not simply because the community educators are doing an excellent job, but because they continually seek to do their job even better.

The major findings and recommendations of the External Review Team are:

Student Achievement

1. Since 1980, the standardized test scores reported by the district in reading, mathematics, and language have shown major gains in student achievement in the Pittsburgh Public Schools. Because the district does not administer standardized tests to its students in science, changes are not known in that area.

   Recommendations: (a) Maintain and strengthen the programs that have produced the gains. (b) Conduct an evaluation to determine the district's success in "increasing the quality and pacing of. . . science courses."

2. The district's impressive gains on achievement tests may be reaching a plateau because: (a) the district's main instructional program is so focused on basic skills that higher order thinking is relatively neglected, (b) the energy that has motivated program implementation to date needs renewal, and (c) the achievement tests used to assess the gains are limited measures of student achievement.

   Recommendation: To reach the next level, the district will have to design a more comprehensive program, one that includes higher order cognition, affective, social, and cultural components that engage and support the multiracial, multicultural urban community it serves. The elements of such an approach exist in plans written in 1987 by the district's committees on the racial achievement gap and low achieving students, and they should be used. Program implementation should occur after a time of review, reflection, and communication across the district (i.e., between and among various school and central office units). This will enable new clarity and unity about goals that will restore the staff's energy. The new goals must focus on individual school differences as a source of strength as well as of need. Means of assessment must be devised that respond to the complexity of this new approach.

3. The district has made substantial gains in assisting low achieving students, as evidenced by the low proportions of students at all grade levels scoring below the 25th percentile.

   Recommendation: The district should continue its attention to programs serving students scoring below the 25th percentile.

4. A racial achievement gap divides black and white students' test scores. While progress was made in reducing that gap from 1979 to 1984, there has been little change since then in reading and language. In mathematics, the gap has widened by five points since 1984. The pilot programs the district has in place are supplementary in nature and, therefore, insufficient to close the gap even if fully implemented throughout the district.

   Recommendation: Closing the racial achievement gap must be made a priority by the board, the superintendent, and the district staff. To

close it, a comprehensive program like that described in item 2 above will be required.

5. A comprehensive staff development program founded on a belief that constructive support is a productive means of improving instruction and leadership has been a critical and fundamental ingredient of the district's success.

   Recommendation: The board must continue to fund and encourage staff development programs that enhance the skills of district staff members as they undertake new and more complex efforts to improve instruction in Pittsburgh. PRISM should be strengthened by focusing on subject matter content more than on general instructional methods and by emphasizing the knowledge, understanding, and behaviors necessary to close the racial achievement gap and to continue to improve instruction for low achieving students.

Student Discipline

1. The district has established and disseminated a consistent district-wide discipline code and set of procedures.

   Recommendation: Review the use of these procedures to assure that they are equitably applied in all district schools.

2. The district is piloting a set of programs designed to prevent serious discipline problems, dropouts, suspensions, and expulsions.

   Recommendation: These programs must be evaluated to assess the extent to which they are achieving this purpose.

3. The high levels of suspensions, and emphasis on rote learning tasks in detention and in-school suspension programs are indicative of an uncharacteristically narrow and punitive approach to discipline in the district.

   Recommendation: The district must develop a comprehensive discipline program that, like the achievement program proposed above, includes affective, social, and cultural components that engage and support its multiracial, multicultural urban community.

4. The district's commitment to addressing discipline issues is unevenly implemented. The organization and leadership of the Pupil Services department has changed several times in the past eight years and these changes have weakened its potential effectiveness.

   Recommendations:

   a. Appoint a department head who is recognized as a leader and will serve long-term with a mandate to direct the district's total discipline effort.

b. Establish an electronic data base for collecting and reporting all discipline-related information disaggregated by gender, ethnicity, offense, and location.

c. Report district data regularly to the board and superintendent, including analyses and recommendations about emerging problems as well as progress.

d. Replace the overuse of out-of-school suspensions and transferring students to other schools with alternatives that respond to high school students who are finding school a difficult place to be.

Staff Evaluation

1. PRISM was designed as a staff evaluation program for both principals and teachers. Its in-service included research-based guidelines for promoting effective instruction and school leadership. This simultaneous attention to evaluation and to the elements of school and instructional effectiveness, involving both principals and teachers, established the comprehensive approach that led to improved instruction district-wide.

   Recommendation: A constructive approach to staff evaluation, based on a clear model, must be maintained and extended in the future.

2. Instructional Team Leaders (ITLs) and Instructional Cabinets are promising approaches to strengthening school site and shared decision making.

   Recommendation: To avoid these innovations becoming routine replicas of old structures (such as department heads), their responsibilities must be challenging and clear. For example, making Instructional Cabinets accountable for closing the racial achievement gap or reducing the numbers of suspensions at their schools would give them a specific role central to the priorities of the district. For the ITLs to become effective leaders in their schools, staff development will be necessary.

3. A positive approach to staff evaluation has been evident in the unique relationship between and among the board, superintendent, and teachers' organization (Pittsburgh Federation of Teachers).

   Recommendation: Continue the hard work that has resulted in this productive relationship, and extend the results still further.

4. A negative tone appears to characterize the board's relationship with the district's principals and administrators. There is an air of mistrust and uncertainty that is inconsistent with the constructive programs and support that have been the foundation of the district's accomplishments.

   Recommendation: The board and administration need to work with the administrative leadership in a manner like that used with the Pittsburgh Federation of Teachers. Using a positive approach similar to that which characterizes the PRISM program would allow all four groups to work together to move the district to yet a higher level than has been

achieved. They must share and develop leadership skills at the district, school, and classroom levels that unite the system.

Attracting and Holding Students

1. The district has made excellent strides in attracting students to its schools.

   Recommendation: This accomplishment is a by-product of the district's achievement program. As that program continues to improve, more students will be attracted to the Pittsburgh Public Schools.

2. The district's efforts to hold students are mixed. Enrollment decline has ended, but dropouts and suspensions remain problems.

   Recommendation: The district's accomplishments in this area will be determined by the successes of the improved achievement and discipline programs recommended above.

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